

***LECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME***

**South Bend, Ind., 2 p.m., Friday, Nov, 3, 2006**

**DeBartolo Hall, Dept. of Economics and Policy Studies**

***“THE INTERSECTION OF VALUES AND POLITICS IN MODERN AMERICAN LIFE”***

I was asked to discuss the relationship between values and politics in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. The topic can mean different things to different people. But I thought it might be helpful for you to get a bird's eye view of how a Governor sets and implements policy consistent with his values, and how values influence policy.

I will try to give you some idea of how good values, when set in motion in small steps, can create great change, and how small departures from those values create huge problems.

To some, values refer only to “religious” values. Others understand values to be an ingredient of our personality, formed not so much by religion, but by life experiences.

I prefer to think of “values” as a combination of all of those things.

For the most part, we are all products of our environment, experiences and learning. But religion is a strong influence on all of our values.

And faith and religion play a much bigger role in our lives than we often realize.

We find ourselves immersed in such time consuming careers, like public service, and we spend only an hour or two a week at church. We tend to feel we are not as involved or engaged religiously as we should be. But trying to put a stopwatch on religion misses the point and overlooks the years of building on religious principles that later define our values and affect our decisions.

My mother always insisted I go to mass every Sunday. “Even if you are not getting anything out of it, she said, you are putting something in.” Now, years later, those so very early Sunday masses and so very long sermons are part of who I am.

To the extent that our values guide our policy, and our religion influences our values, then our religious faith guides that policy as well.

However, this is not a violation of the constitutional provisions regarding separation of church and state. We are not required to separate morality from policy. To the contrary, it is quite natural and appropriate to navigate public policy with our own internal moral compass.

But, I am very uncomfortable when I hear politicians invoke the Almighty for their own purposes. How often have each of us been offended to hear the name of God invoked to demean and even hurt people who do not see the world as we do. Such talk diminishes religion and turns people off.

It is better to remember the words of my patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi, who said, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”

St. Francis reminds us that action and deed are what really matter.